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KEEPING THE SCORE

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Why do we mark pupils at all? What could have prompted the first teacher to start a marking system? Was it through a desire to stimulate the pupils through emulation to stronger effort? Or could it have been through a desire to record individual shortcomings and so enable the teacher to modify his instruction accordingly?

From a superficial consideration, one would say that both the reasons suggested lie at the bottom of our present-day marking systems. Of the first, certainly there is no doubt. The average boy or girl of high-school age, living in the future as adolescents always do, incapable of associating future station in life with present necessary preparation, must be artificially stimulated to put forth sufficient effort to make this preparation. Hence the class book and the monthly report card. That our marking systems of today are fraught with innumerable weaknesses and inconsistencies, their most loyal adherents cannot deny; on the other hand, that they do serve as a spur to the laggard, even their most outspoken opponents must admit.

But with reference to the second *raison d'être*, the question arises, just how much do our marking systems function in controlling instruction? Does the regulation class book, ruled off into four weeks of five days each, with just space enough for a scale letter or numeral, enable the teacher to find out specifically the weak points of a given pupil? In practice, the ordinary marking system simply registers relative standing with respect to other pupils in the class. It can be said to give, at most, a general diagnosis of the pupils' relative condition; it certainly does not furnish a prescription for the teacher to follow. It is here that our marking systems break down; they do not provide for treatment.

There must be, then, a third and more valid reason for maintaining marking systems. The patrons of the school, employers, and citizens at large are more intimately concerned with marking systems than they themselves or school administrators and teachers realize. The monthly report, yearly report, or graduation diploma stands for the presence or the absence of qualities necessary for the preservation and well-being of society in general. Diplomas are hallmarks of excellence like the chemical manufacturer's "C.P." guaranty. School records can rightly be put in the category of "books" as the accountant uses the term. They must, if they are to serve these purposes properly, be kept according to some uniform system intelligible to the people most vitally interested—the public. Public schools are institutions maintained by the public; here the public is supposedly trained to meet the demands of practical life. The public, as stockholders, if not having access to the books themselves, should be furnished at least an intelligible balance sheet setting forth specifically the condition of the business from time to time, and these balance sheets should be in terms which set forth clearly the amount and quality of the finished product compared with the raw material. The preferred stockholders—the fathers and mothers—should receive periodically special reports with respect to raw material, processes, and results. Furthermore, marks should be so clear in their meaning to the employing public that when a pupil enters the ranks as a workman his employer may know definitely the kind of work and the amount which can reasonably be expected. If marking were done on a more human basis, our high-stand pupils would always be the high-stand men and women of the world of affairs. There would be no school dullards of the Scott, Irving, Watts, and Darwin type, later to be recognized as world-renowned savants and geniuses.

There is at the present time a remarkable lack of agreement between school-placed estimates and society-placed estimates as to the worth of a given pupil. Society gauges him by what he does, by his reactions to environment. The school, on the contrary, registers its approval or disapproval according to what he knows, how much he has conned from the printed page or taken in by means of his ear. What can be the reason for these two so wholly diver-

gent views? Logically, it would seem that there can be but three factors entering in the problem: (1) what is taught (the curriculum), (2) who teaches it (the teacher), and (3) how the results are measured (the marking system). In this paper only the third will be considered.

It is clear now that a large proportion of the misunderstanding that exists between the school and the public results from inadequate marking systems. The faults of these systems are many, but their most obvious ones are their indefiniteness, their lack of scope, and the absence of guiding principles or goals to be attained.

There is nothing at all definite about our marking systems. Let us take an illustrative case—*time*: dismissal hour on report day; *place*: the teacher's home room; *dramatis personae*: the teacher, tired and worn, holding at bay a circle of twenty-five disgruntled pupils. Taken one at a time, the boldest would be docility itself; but, in a pack, even the meek and timid Bobby Jones becomes emboldened.

What is the trouble? Scores have been given out, and nobody knows the rules of the game, not even the "umpire" with all his array of figures so meticulously entered in his class book. What do figures have to do with a subject like English or history? The teachers themselves do not know what they mean. You look into your class book and find that on the eighth day of the month Smith left the class with two units' worth of English to his credit, while Brown received nine units' worth. But does Smith know, does Brown know, does the teacher know what constitutes a unit? Certainly not; the system is absolutely arbitrary. A numeral opposite a name means nothing intrinsically; it merely signifies a sort of relativity. Since the system is altogether artificial, the results cannot possibly be accepted as trustworthy. Nobody has a keener appreciation of this fact than that large body of conscientious teachers who often change marks, derived through that specious but illusory mathematical process—the law of averages—to figures that coincide with their general sense of values. This is nothing more than an attempt to humanize the system, even though resort is confessedly made to that science-tabooed device—the guess.

Our marking systems are painfully lacking in scope. The letter and numeral systems for valuing daily recitations apparently take into consideration only one thing—knowledge, irrespective of the way this knowledge may have been attained or the manner in which it is presented. They ignore absolutely such fundamental socializing characteristics as regard for the rights of others, care of public property, respect for law and order, and reverence for the sacred. In grammar schools in general and commercial high schools in particular there are scores of activities, only incidentally related to the learning process so called, that should be taken into consideration in making up the pupil's rating. Such gauging data as general attitude toward work, care of books and materials, general neatness, and undirected effort at personal improvement are most significant.

"Pupils are marked," says Superintendent Martin of Norristown, Pennsylvania, "too much on matter, and not enough on manner. . . . The important function of real education continues to be training in correct methods of thought. The important concerns of the individual are his reactions to his environments, and these reactions are determined by his rationalism."¹ "It is what our pupils do that counts, not what they know," says William Chandler Bagley. "Knowledge is of the utmost importance, but is important only as a means to an end, and that end is conduct."

There ought to be some consideration of personal traits. Apparently this need is coming to be recognized in some quarters. A personal rating system has just been adopted at Dartmouth, according to reports from Hanover. This new system recognizes that scholarship is not the only criterion of a student's ability to cope with the manifold problems of the outer world. Each man is given a general examination in personality, intelligence, responsibility, and aggressiveness, and is rated accordingly. Every student is given a rating by each of his instructors. The results are remarkable in their agreement.

Though there are a few pleas for reform and a few examples of change, very little has been done in most schools toward improving

¹ A. S. Martin, "How to Study," *Education*, XL (December, 1919), 250.

the marking system. Doubtless one reason for this is the stubborn refusal on the part of a not inconsiderable number of educators to accept the unpleasant fact that most boys and girls work solely for marks. The practical teacher accepts this as a matter of course. What a power for good, then, is placed in the teacher's hands! If the young are so prone toward working for marks, the logical course to follow would be to take this as a cue and make the most of it. The young work for the tangible, for immediate results; hence the need for marking systems. Then let us see to it that they are given something worth working for, and mark them accordingly. Let us place the emphasis on broad, socializing principles, practical codes of behavior, and on simple, clearly outlined ideals that fall within the range of juvenile comprehension. With proper attitudes developed in the present generation, we need not fear for the welfare of the succeeding one. Departmentalization, with all its good points, is woefully lacking in one respect; it does not provide the pupil with one particular teacher who is personally interested and feels individually responsible for that pupil's conduct in general and his attitude toward life.

The third outstanding fault of present-day marking systems is their absence of guiding principles, objectives, and goals. It is immaterial here whether the blame for this rests on the individual teacher or on administrative bodies higher up; the fact is that our systems are unbelievably blind and purposeless. They are hopelessly antiquated; they are in a state of retardation, not having kept pace with the general march of educational ideas. The entire scheme is accepted on the part of most principals and teachers as a sort of clumsy makeshift because there is nothing better.

Marking systems can function properly only where they are used in connection with clearly conceived educational policies. As S. E. Davis has said:

Reduced to its lowest terms, education has often been said to consist of ideals and attitudes, habits, and knowledge. . . . Complete self-respect, enthusiasm for generous or noble conduct in friend or foe, "large" ways of considering affairs—these as ideals are a vital part of what the school should give. The direction one is going is of more importance than his speed or knowledge of the road. Yet in spite of their fundamental value, ideals and attitudes are very difficult to reduce to any standard of measurement.¹

¹ S. E. Davis, *The Work of the Teacher*, p. 257.

Superintendents and principals would do well not to employ teachers until they have first received signed statements clearly setting forth their educational views. Church boards and political machines seem to be about the only organizations that are right on this matter. Charles Francis Adams in his autobiography brings a bitter arraignment against the educational system, or lack of system, of his day when he says, "I should now respect myself a great deal more if I had then rebelled and run away from home, to sea, or to the devil."

There is still another fault to be pointed out. Marking systems now in force are perennial sources of irritation between pupil and pupil, and between pupil and teacher. They breed distrust, jealousy, dishonesty, to say nothing of superficiality and countless other similarly diseased excrescencies. Furthermore, in extreme cases they make intolerable despots of the teachers and open rebels of the pupils.

Encountering all these faults, and unable to place any confidence in the system, teachers adopt some sort of haphazard device that will palliate their professional consciences, though falling far short of satisfying their sense of moral obligation to the pupil in particular and society in general.

One possible remedy for all this may come through the introduction of an open system of marking, with the modern duplicating feature, such as is used in salesbooks, bank deposit books, repair-job slips, laundry tickets, and other similar business devices. Modern business is built on confidence. Duplicating systems engender confidence and, for this reason, are indispensable in modern business. Fear and distrust of the dark are biologically as old as life itself. The manufacturer knows this and gives us open bathtubs instead of the old built-in ones, visible typewriters instead of the invisible, glass-front stoves, and daylight developing machines for our snapshots. In a word, the whole tendency is to relieve the everyday life processes of the hidden and secretive, to work in the open, to do things above board. But how is it in the schools? Why all this secrecy about the process by which marks are obtained, as though they were derived by the teacher through the performance of certain mystic rites, the witnessing of which on the part of the pupil would be profanation of the grossest sort?

Hands go up in consternation at the suggestion that a duplicating system be applied to school work. There are visions of carbon sheets and receipts which are torn out after each recitation and given to the pupil as a check on the probity of the teacher against report day; of the teacher lost in a maze of records, with no time left for teaching; of the pupil now raised to the teacher's level in his capacity as a fellow business transactor. It is needless to follow farther this familiar course of reasoning. The ultra-conservative always see dire calamity at the end of every new path, and, accordingly, a duplicate system of marking, in which one record is kept by the teacher and its tally by the pupil, is thought of as leading surely to utter disregard for authority and ultimately to rank bolshevism.

But the proposed plan has been tried, and with gratifying results. The writer is using a system which consists of cards providing for the name and class number of the pupil, together with a list of characteristics sufficiently broad, and at the same time definite enough, for recording both the strong and weak points of each pupil. The list falls into three main heads: (a) personality, (b) attitude, and (c) everyday life qualifications (business). Personality is subdivided into posture, appearance, and voice. Attitude falls under three subheads: (1) toward teacher (loyalty), (2) toward fellow-pupils, and (3) toward work. Numbers 1 and 2 are given places on the card with the hope of determining early in the pupil's life what his attitude toward his employer and his fellow-workers will be. Number 3 is again subdivided into oral recitation (with respect to both facts and the presentation of these facts), written recitation (with respect to both facts and presentation), spelling, punctuation, diction, reasoning, month's test (with respect to both facts and presentation), and home work. The following are the twelve everyday life or business qualifications referred to: courtesy, honesty, punctuality, accuracy, neatness, speed, system, heedfulness, originality, initiative, articulation, and pronunciation.

In order to facilitate the making of this record, as was indicated, a card is provided, on the face of which are all of the items mentioned in the foregoing paragraph. The reverse of the card gives

directions for making the records and is reproduced in full as follows:

Parent's name.....
 Parent's business address.....
 Pupil's home address.....
 Telephone No.....
 Home room No..... Teacher.....
 Are you a tuition pupil?.....
 Do you work?.....At what?.....
 No. of hours spent at work per week.....
 What are you most interested in?.....

INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of the School Score Card is to bring out the best in the pupil by marking him on those things only which have a direct bearing on life and its problems, to gain his confidence and co-operation by appealing to his sense of fairness, to teach him how to place a correct estimate upon himself.

How to use the card.—The score card is an automatic device by which the pupil can figure his standing each day in the school month. Each plus (+) counts 10; each neutral (—), 5; each minus (—), 2; and each bar (1), 0. To determine one's mark on a given day, it is only necessary to total the plus, neutral, minus, and bar values and divide this number by the total number of marks registered on the card. For example, suppose the pupil, at the end of the month, finds that he has 35 plusses (350), 6 neutrals (30), 5 minuses (10), and 2 bars (0). These total 390. $390 \div 48$ (total number of marks on card = 8.12, or 81.2 reduced to a percentage basis, the gross daily average for the month.

Before the net daily average mark for the month can be obtained, however, it is necessary to combine with the gross daily mark the written recitation mark. Multiply 81.2 by 20, the number of marking days in the month. This gives 1624. To this add whatever mark was made in the written recitation and divide by 21, if there were only one written recitation given, and if the written recitation covered two days' work, double the mark, add it to 1624, and divide by 22, etc. Should there be more than one written recitation mark to consider, the same process is used, it being borne in mind that the mark on the written recitation paper must be multiplied by the number of days covered by the paper, and each day covered counts one to be added to the number of marking days in the month.

The following shows a pupil's score worked out for the month:

$+=10 \times 35=350$ value of total number of plusses for month

$\sim = 5 \times 6= 30$ value of total number of neutrals for month

$- = 2 \times 5= 10$ value of total number of minuses for month

$\text{I} = 0 \times 2= 0$ value of total number of bars for month

$\frac{48}{390} (81.2 \times 20, \text{ number marking days}) = 1624$

1st written record $= 75 \times 3$ (number days' work covered) = 225

2d written record $= 60 \times 2$ (number days' work covered) = 120

3d written record $= 80 \times 1$ (number days' work covered) = 80

$2049 \div 26 = 78.4$, the net daily average for the month 2049

$\frac{2}{156.8}$

75.0 = mark received on monthly test

$\frac{75.0}{3} 231.8 (77.2 = \text{pupil's mark for the month})$

The cards are kept in duplicate, one by the teacher and one by the pupil. The teacher is, *ex officio*, the "umpire"; the class leader is the scorekeeper. When the recitation starts, the teacher hands over to the class leader all the cards, arranged numerically with respect to the individual numbers of the pupils. A pupil then rises to recite, calls out his number, and proceeds with his recitation, after which the teacher calls off his score. This is entered by the class leader on the official card and, at the same time, by the pupil on his own card, which he always keeps in a paper pocket in his assignment book. The next pupil called upon tries, naturally enough, to avoid the pitfalls into which the preceding fell. In this way the recitation improves progressively as the hour advances. If it is so desired, the teacher may enter the marks on the official cards. To have this done by a trustworthy student, however, not only gives the teacher a free hand for carrying on the instruction, but at the same time secures the confidence of the students, by selecting one of their number to record the scores.

Care should be taken to make certain concessions to the first two reciters, for the simple reason that they must lead the way for the others. It will be found a good plan to use a special ink, green or violet, giving a certain air of "officialdom" to the system, which the pupils welcome. Scorekeeping should never be permitted to

become merely a mechanical process. There are times when the spirit of the recitation is at such white heat that it would be better not to give scores at all. Pupils should be scored each day regularly, however, upon the character of their home work and the promptness with which they bring it in. The possibility of getting at least two plusses every day insures them of a reserve, so that when a minus is registered they are not altogether insolvent.

There is one feature of this system that commends itself most heartily to all the pupils—its revised up-to-the-minute character. By means of the card the pupils are able to figure out their own scores for any day in the school month. They not only know how far they are falling below the required passing mark, but they know specifically in what they are falling short. When they do fail, they know that the fault is none other than their own, and that there is no possible chance of “talking teacher into changing the mark.” The result is that only the best feeling exists between teacher and pupil. In a word, the entire system is designed after the plan of the sport score card, in which everything is done above board; players, umpire, and spectators all know the rules of the game, and the results are measured to the satisfaction of all.

There will never be any headway made in our marking systems until they are established upon a more human basis. The prevalent “gorging regurgitating” process should be relegated to that limbo to which ages ago were consigned the abandoned conceits of the Schoolmen. The pupils must be taken into the teacher’s full confidence. They must know that, after all, the marking system is nothing more than a debit-credit process, interpreted through symbols which are thoroughly familiar to both teacher and pupil.

Teach the pupils how to read their scores, and they will play not only a more interesting, but at the same time a more profitable, game.